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"There are standards we have

ments next month.

The direct-lending program

'Wobblies' organize book shop

Steve Bloom The Olympian

SOLID: Libros Sin Fronteras staff (from left) Jess Grant, Xui Garcia and Ron Cerro stand outside the bookstore in downtown Olympia.

■ **IWW:** International Workers of the World represents employees of an Olympia book distributor.

By Sandra Medearis
The Olympian

The Wobblies are back.

"Wobblies" and "Wobs" are nicknames for members of the International Workers of the World. Twenty of the 800 members claimed by the Wobblies belong to the Olympia branch of the labor union.

This month, the union won an employee election to represent workers at the downtown Olympia book distributors, Libros Sin Fronteras (Books without Borders). It's a business that imports books from Central America and distributes them to libraries and schools.

In a secret election run by the National Labor Relations Board, the Wobblies won in a 5-2 vote.

The workers formed a union when contract negotiations broke down, Jess Grant said.

Grant is an IWW member and former national general secretary of the IWW who works as a bookkeeper at the bookstore. He is attending The Evergreen State College.

"We were in informal negotiations, but we weren't getting anywhere. I think the owner was feeling that we were spending too much time on the clock discussing it," Grant said.

"We hope the victory is a signal to sit down to negotiate a contractual agreement, Grant said. "It's not so much about money, but about security and benefits."

Employees want disciplinary steps and employee promotion policies to be spelled out in contract language, Grant added.

"It is nerve-wracking for the workers, not knowing what to expect or how it works for promotions," Grant said.

Michael Shapiro, owner of the business he founded about eight years ago, has seen his time stolen from customers and his business by having to hire a lawyer and deal with the IWW, he said.

"Jess Grant is an experienced labor organizer with the IWW. I am a small-business person who in the last month has had to seek legal representation just to understand issues brought out by Jess and the IWW," Shapiro said. "I need to be focusing on my customers and my mission in a very competitive marketplace."

Four of his seven employees quit within 48 hours of the election, Shapiro said. Because the election of a union to represent employees in a bargaining unit is secret by law, Shapiro does not know their union affiliation, he said.

"I am currently looking for qualified staff, preferably bilingual in English and Spanish," Shapiro said. "Meantime, we'll begin collective bargaining. It never occurred to me that a business as small as mine would be in the position of talking to lawyers doing a lot of paperwork because a labor union chose to organize us."

There is no limit on how few employees can become a bargaining group, Raymond D. Willms, assistant to the NLRB regional director said. The limit deals with revenue. Employees may elect to become a bargaining group if a retail operation does $500,000 worth of business per year, or a nonretail operation, $50,000 in business.

The next objective on the local IWW slate is to organize the student employees at Evergreen, Grant said.

"There are many low-paid workers being exploited over there," Grant said.